



# THE BEATLES TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS

A BIOGRAPHY

JAMES L DESPER JR

# **The Beatles**

# **Tomorrow Never Knows**

**A Biography**

**James L Desper Jr**

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Dedicated to:  
All those who, as I have, found pleasure, solace and  
enlightenment in the marvelous music of  
The Beatles



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# 1

## 1940 - 1959

"Why don't we just light the bommie now?" The community bonfire wasn't until the next night, but that wasn't about to stop young John Lennon from having some fun. And if that fun shocked and outraged the elders of Woolton, so much the better. With his pal Pete Shotton and the rest of their gang, he was ready for anything that this sleepy little village on the outskirts of Liverpool had to offer. A world of its own, Woolton's fields and woods offered an ideal place for a lad to grow up. Or go wild, as was John's habit. He and the others broke streetlamps, smashed shop windows, shoplifted, set fires, mocked the disabled and scared little old ladies. John had no use for school except as another staging area for mischief and pranks. Intelligent, energetic, and a voracious reader, the schoolmasters had no hope of keeping pace with his active mind. His friends had the same problem. Would any of them have dared to suggest that they burn the 20 foot high pile of wood, paper and trash that the townspeople had been gathering for weeks? It didn't really matter, because John was there first. As the flames leapt higher and higher, they watched from a hilltop across the road until realizing they could easily be seen by those gathering to witness the inferno. So, slipping away into the darkness, they crept home.

John made his way back to his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George's place, where he'd lived on and off since he was five. A comfortable four-bedroom home that they'd named Mendips, it had a large yard with plenty of space for a boy to play in. John had his own room where he could read, draw, paint and listen to music to his heart's content. He didn't often have friends over, though. Mimi wouldn't allow them in the house. A very cold and strict disciplinarian, she loved John to distraction, but could only express those feelings by providing a good home for him. His Uncle George's warm and affectionate nature took some of the sting out of Mimi's hardheartedness, but could never provide the love he'd experienced when he lived with his mother Julia. Julia was Mimi's emotional opposite. Gay, carefree and demonstrative, she'd made some mistakes in her past, mistakes that Mimi used as an excuse to pry John from



her side. She felt that Julia was not a fit mother for such a fine boy as John and confronted her often with that accusation, sometimes in John's presence. He was forced to witness these disturbing scenes all too often, even after he had come to live with Mimi. Julia had never wanted to give John up, but that didn't help John's pain and confusion over the fact that she had done so anyway.

Even more upsetting were his father's rare visits. A merchant seaman, Alfred Lennon was away for most of every year, when he didn't get himself jailed in some foreign port, that is. It was trouble of this sort that had caused him to lose Julia. When all communication and financial support from him ceased when John was still a toddler, Julia felt abandoned and sought the company of other men. She was finished with Freddie, but he could not give her a divorce; he wasn't around. When he finally did show up, there were fireworks aplenty. The worst of it had been when John was living with Mimi the first time. Freddie appeared out of nowhere and persuaded Mimi to let John go with him, so he said, for a few days on holiday. But Freddie intended to emigrate to New Zealand and take his son with him. After he regained the boy's affection, they would be off.

When Julia heard that Freddie had taken John, she immediately set out in pursuit. Catching up with them in Blackpool, she demanded John's immediate return. Freddie refused, but then decided on a course of action that would scar John emotionally for the rest of his life. Putting the boy on his knee, he asked John if he wanted to go with his mother or stay with him. John, excited to see his father again and happy with all the fun they'd been having, said he would stay with him. But when he saw his mother's departure, he ran after her. It would be the last time he would see his father until after he had become famous.

After getting John back, Julia was determined not to return him to Mimi and used Mimi's negligence in letting him go off with Freddie as her excuse for keeping him with her. She and her new boyfriend John Dykins rented a tiny apartment and moved into it with John. It was all they could afford, but it was a home. Mimi, however, would not give up John without a fight. She sent a social worker around to witness their living conditions. Since John didn't have his own room, it was decreed that he must return to Mimi's, where he lived until he began to go out on his own. This hurt Julia terribly. She had a record, 'My Son John, To Me You Are So Wonderful', that she would play as she sat and cried for her lost son.

So, at a very early age, John had endured more emotional trauma than any child should ever have to. It was no wonder he was so hard to handle. No one could control him. Mimi could only do her best to deal with the aftermath and clamp down even harder on her wayward charge. Even more devastating were

the effects on John's psyche. "When I looked at myself in the mirror when I was twelve, thirteen, I used to, literally, trance out...I would find myself seeing hallucinatory images of my face changing...the eyes would get bigger and the room vanish...Surrealism to me is reality. Psychedelic vision is reality to me and always was."

When a young child is uprooted repeatedly and psychologically traumatized, a survival instinct sets in. They adjust their personality to fit into their present circumstance. Any sense of identity is swamped by the need to say and do whatever is necessary to ensure some sense of stability and safety. The repeated emotional upsets of John's childhood left him, as he later admitted, without a real identity, without a personality of his own. He projected a tough-guy facade to hide his massive insecurities, but when confronted with a person of strong will, he would mold himself to fit. He had paid a terrible price, but he now had what all visionary artists have, the ability to project himself so completely into any situation, real or imaginary, that he could almost live there. The scourge of his youth would become the gift that rewarded him beyond his wildest dreams. When the Beatles were in the studio creating John's 'Being For The Benefit Of Mr. Kite', he told their producer George Martin, "I want to be able to smell the sawdust and the animals." Mr. Kite's circus world was so vivid that he could smell it.

In the meantime, however, every day was a battle. John fought constantly with any authority figure that might get in the way of his fun. And as he grew older the reproofs from the schoolmasters became, if anything, more timid, for John had developed a razor-sharp wit that could humiliate anyone who dared to verbally joust with him. John's hostility was such that the smaller amongst them feared being beaten as John grew bigger and stronger. His schoolmates felt the same. If John couldn't physically dominate an adversary on the playground, he resorted to his verbal skills to undermine and embarrass them until they knuckled under.

Nothing seemed to satisfy him except activities that offered a chance for creative expression. Pulling pranks was one outlet for his creativity, but writing, painting and drawing had one big advantage over troublemaking: He didn't have to run for the hills when his activities were discovered. Usually. He had a habit, like many boys his age, of making obscene drawings for the amusement and edification of his buddies. But most of his drawings would yield surrealistic renderings of characters in absurd situations saying even more absurd things.

John had acquired a love of wordplay, altering spelling and exploiting double meanings to sometimes brilliantly amusing effect. This was partly the result of his dyslexia, which made spelling and word comprehension difficult. He and

his pal Pete Shotton became Shennon and Lotton, as one example. John would doodle aimlessly while trying not to fall asleep in class. After a while he had accumulated a notebook filled with such musings that became popular reading among his friends and classmates. He labeled it *The Daily Howl* and would pass it around as new items were added. When it fell temporarily into the hands of the school faculty, there was quite a bit of comment and amusement over it in the teachers' lounge. But they were at a total loss over how to guide John's obvious talents toward a productive end. A detention sheet discovered in 2013 for May and June of 1955 from Quarry Bank High reveals eighteen separate infractions during a one month period for offenses as varied as "sabotage," "idleness," "silly noises in an examination," "nuisance," "chewing in class," and, "just no interest whatsoever."